

Cp283.09
E22d

Declaration of Independence by a Colonial
Church by Richard Dillads

The Library
of the
University of North Carolina



Collection of North Caroliniana

Endowed by
John Sprunt Hill
of the Class of 1889

Cp283.09
E22d

MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

VOL. XXVIII

DECEMBER, 1892

No. 6

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE BY A COLONIAL CHURCH

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF NORTH CAROLINA

EDENTON and its environs was the nucleus of civilization for one section of the state of North Carolina at a very early date. St. Paul's church in Edenton is identified with the history of the colony, an account of which forms an interesting chapter. The vestry-books, dating back to 1701, still in a state of perfect preservation, are of uncommon historic interest.

North Carolina's most accurate historian, Martin, in referring to the early settlement of the state, says: "At this time [about 1658] there were two points only in which incipient English settlements could be discerned, the one on the northern shore of Albemarle sound and the streams which flow into it, the population of which was very thin and the greatest part of it on the north-east bank of Chowan river"; the other was the settlement near the site of the present city of Wilmington, of which we have nothing to say in this paper. Lawson, our first historian, whose tragic fate with the Indians is more than a counterpart of the romantic adventures of Captain John Smith, testifies to the same fact. The thickest part of this settlement first received the name of "Chowon precinct," and is subsequently alluded to as the "towne in Queen Ann's Creek," the "towne in Mattercomock Creek," and "Port of Roanoke." Upon the death of the royal governor, Edenton, in 1722, it was dignified by the name of Edenton in his honor. Bancroft says: "Here was a colony of men from civilized life, scattered among the forests, resting on the bosom of nature. *With absolute freedom of conscience*, benevolent reason was the simple rule of their conduct. Are there any," says he, "who doubt man's capacity for self-government, let them study the history of North Carolina."

This colony attracted the attention of Sir Wm. Berkeley, of Virginia, who appointed, in 1663, William Drummond, a Scotch Presbyterian then residing in Virginia, their first governor.

Q283.09
E222

83448

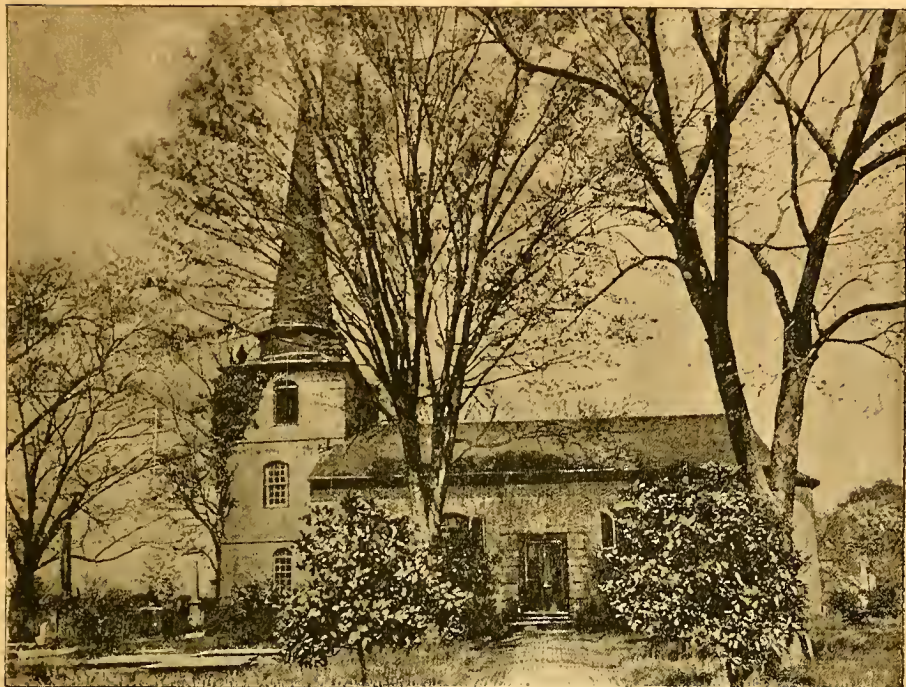
I wish the reader to note, and history confirms the fact, that resistance to British authority existed here nearly one hundred years before the Revolution, for the many early disturbances and frequent rebellions were nothing more than a resistance to "illegal and usurped authority," and a contest for religious freedom. These were long shadows cast before the mighty revolution.

This little colony might, therefore, be styled the embryo republic, and the birthplace of the American Revolution. In the history of all governments the oppressed are long tolerant of their oppressors before they break their chains, and revolution was a progressive development. It took nearly five hundred years to free France of its despots. Brazil, I believe, presents a singular exception, when, as if by magic, the empire ceased to exist, and a virgin republic sprang full-panoplied upon the scene.

The same liberty-loving spirit which characterized the people of this colony crystallized in subsequent years in the form of the "St. Paul's Declaration of Independence."

Pursuant to an act of assembly, the vestry of St. Paul's met at the house of Thomas Gilliam, December 15, 1701. The Hon. Henderson Walker, then governor, Colonel Wm. Wilkinson, and Captain Thomas Lewton were appointed wardens for a year, and instructed "to agree with a workman for building a church twenty-five feet long, posts in the ground, and held to the collar beams." It was built upon an acre of land given by Edward Smethwick, and was finished in 1702. This was the first church ever built upon North Carolina soil. The vestries of those old days, when church and state were united, possessed considerable civil authority, and were about equal in power to our county commissioners. They were empowered to collect tithes, provide standards of weights and measures, etc.

In 1704 Dr. John Blair presented himself to the vestry as a minister, and was received by them at a salary of thirty pounds per year. The services had previously been conducted by readers employed at a small salary, whose only qualifications were that they should promise to live sober and exemplary lives during their period of service. The temporary church lasted but a few years, for in 1709 the Rev. Mr. Adams, who came here under the auspices of the "Society for Propagating the Gospel," wrote: "They built a church some years ago, but it is small and very sorrily put together, and therefore I prevailed with them to build another, which they went about when I came away." The dimensions of the new church were forty feet long, twenty-four feet wide, and fourteen feet high. In 1714, according to the records, this church was still unfinished, and it was either



ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, EDENTON, NORTH CAROLINA—COMPLETED IN 1745.

never finished at all or soon fell into decay, for Governor Boyd of Virginia, who was here in 1728 on the commission to run the boundary line between North Carolina and Virginia, says that Mr. Fontaine, the minister who accompanied him, "preached in the court-house for want of a consecrated place of worship." It was not until 1729 that the initial step was taken towards building the present brick edifice. In April, 1729, Governor Everard wrote the following letter to the bishop of London in regard to the church: "'Tis with no small concern I send you this, to inform you that our church is not built now, nor is it like to be gone about; for those men that were appointed commissioners for the building it have six hundred pounds in their hands, and are now the only opposers of building one. I was, in order to laying the foundation, chose church-warden with one Mr. Mosely. We had several meetings to consult about building it, but could not agree, being always hindered by our secretary, one Mr. John Lovick, a man of no religion, fears not God nor man, believes neither, seldom seen at any place of divine worship, his money is his God, ridicules all goodness. While such a man is in power no good can be expected." In 1736 a tax was laid

for building this church, and in 1738 the work was actually begun; it was not, however, finished until 1745. About the latter part of that century the church fell into decay, and was restored to its present beauty largely through the munificence of Mr. Josiah Collins, and the stained-glass window over the chancel memorializes this act of generosity.

Nine ministers officiated here up to the time of the Revolution, the last one being the Rev. Daniel Earle, familiar to tradition and history as Parson Earle. The early ministers were in some instances unworthy of their trusts: being unwilling to endure the privations and inconveniences of a new and unsettled country, they soon abandoned their flocks and returned to England; but Parson Earle was a man of such strong points of character, and was so typical of the parsons of those old days, that it is interesting to study his life and character. Oliver Wendell Holmes has painted just such an one in his "Wonderful One-hoss Shay." We can almost see him now as he passes in his old stock gig

" Drawn by a rat-tailed, ewe-necked bay."

He was born near the town of Bandon, province of Munster, Ireland, and was the younger son of an Irish nobleman. His family was one of prominence and distinction; one of his ancestors was General Earle, Lord Chief Justice of Ireland in the reign of Queen Anne. In early life he was an officer in the British army, but his marriage with the daughter of a high church official changed the whole course of his life, and he soon resigned his commission to take holy orders. The date of his emigration to America is not known, but he was first sent by the Bishop of London to that part of Virginia now called Gloucester county. In 1757 he came to the Albemarle section to act as curate for the aged Rev. Mr. Hall, the rector of St. Paul's, who was then in feeble health, and in 1760 was made full rector. His charge not only included Edenton, but many mission stations scattered through the section now known as Chowan, Hertford, and Gates counties. His wife, who died before his departure for America, left him two little daughters; these he committed to the care of friends in England, to be reared and educated. When he came to this section he settled on Chowan river, and named his residence Bandon, after his native town. He then married a Welsh lady, the widow Charity Jones, of Smithfield, Virginia, by whom he had no issue. "Parson Earle" was not only a faithful minister, but grew to be a successful farmer and fisherman: he was one of the pioneers in the herring-fishing in this country. About this time his church in Edenton became somewhat dilapidated, and the worshipers few in number. One Sunday morning, tradition has it, when the parson arrived in



COURT-HOUSE AT EDENTON—BUILT IN 1731.

[This was at one time the colonial capital of North Carolina.]

Edenton to preach to the faithful, he was shocked to find placarded upon the church door the following doggerel rhyme :

“A half-built church
And a broken-down steeple,
A herring-catching parson
And a dam set of people.”

He was ever afterwards styled the “herring-catching parson.”

He was an active sympathizer in the struggle for independence, and was on that account debarred from preaching in his church in Edenton during the Revolution.

Several attempts were made by the British to capture him. Upon one

occasion he was informed by a messenger that troops were coming from Edenton to take him prisoner. He immediately buried his silver and treasures in his cellar, and dispatched a servant to his plowmen in the fields to fly to the woods and secrete the horses; but his messenger was too late, and four of his best horses were captured, the parson himself barely escaping. He was unjustly accused by some of being a tory, because he did not sever all connection with the Church of England, and organize an independent church; but he held that the church was of divine origin, that he was a simple priest, and that the bishop of London alone had that power.

He baptized all the children of this section, and was the welcome guest of every fireside. He was a man of high educational attainments, and possessed great wit and humor, united with the kindest of hearts. He was

"True to his country, bounteous to the poor;
In all things temperate, sober, just, and pure."

The two daughters whom he had left in England came to America when they were grown. One of them married Hon. Charles Johnson; the other, Miss Nancy, never married, but assisted her father in a school of high order which he established at Bandon. He died in 1790, and was buried near the site of his old home. The modest slab which once marked his resting-place has long since been covered by the drifting sands, and the tall pines which surround this lonely spot sigh to every passing breeze their sad requiem for the repose of his soul. His church is the admiration of the stranger. Half-clad in ivy, time's green uniform, it stands like a silent sentinel, and as the sun traces the shadow of its tall spire upon the sod, it points almost every hour, like the hand of a huge dial, to the grave of some distinguished citizen. Its gilded cross, glittering and shimmering against the evening sky, suggests the vision of the Emperor Constantine.

The original bell of this church was taken down in response to Beauregard's call to melt the bells of the confederacy and cast them into cannon, which inspired the beautiful war-lyric, "Melt the bells." It helped to form the "Edenton Bell Battery," which did efficient service, and was surrendered to Sherman at Greensborough. The silver chalice and paten now in use bears this inscription: "The gift of Col. Edward Mosely for ye use of ye Church in Edenton in the year of 1725."

The vestry of St. Paul's, imbued with the same spirit of liberty which had inoculated the whole country, gave vent to the following blazing declaration of independence:

"We the subscribers professing our allegiance to the King and acknowl-

edging the constitutional executive power of government, do solemnly profess, testify, and declare that we do absolutely believe that neither the parliament of Great Britain nor any member or constituent branch thereof have a right to impose taxes upon these colonies to regulate the internal policy thereof, and that all attempts by fraud or force to establish and exercise such claims and powers are violations of the peace and security of the people and ought to be resisted to the utmost, and that the people of



HOUSE ERECTED IN 1758 BY THE NOTORIOUS FRANCIS CORBIN.

[Corbin was Lord Granville's land agent in America for his betrothed, Jean Junds, both of whom died before their marriage could be consummated. The property was sold by Corbin's brother and heir, Edmund Corbin, to Dr. Samuel Dickinson, and is still occupied by his descendants. The portrait of Mrs. Penelope Barker, of Revolutionary Tea-party fame, hangs in one of its apartments. The assembly of North Carolina is said to have met here formerly. The initials F. C. and date 1758 are still plainly visible upon the gable-post.]

this province singly and collectively are bound by the acts and resolutions of the continental and provincial congresses, because in both they are freely represented by persons chosen by themselves, and we do solemnly and sincerely promise and engage under the sanction of virtue, honor and the sacred love of liberty and our country to maintain and support all and every the acts, resolutions and regulations of the said continental and provincial congresses to the utmost of our power and ability.

In testimony whereof we have hereto set our hands this 19th of June 1776.

RICHD. HOSKINS.
DAVID RICE.
AARON HILL.
PELATIAH WALTON.
WM. HINTON.

THOS. BONNER.
WM. BOYD.
THOS. BENBURY.
JACOB HUNTER.
JOHN BEASLEY.
WILLIAM BENNETT.
WILLIAM ROBERTS."

Richd Hoskins
David Rice
Aaron Hill
Pelotiah Walton
Wm Hinton

Thos Bonner
Wm Boyd
Thos Benbury
Jacob Hunter
John Beasley
Wm Bennett
William Roberts

FAC-SIMILE OF SIGNATURES FROM THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT.

Here is a declaration of independence of which little is known beyond our borders. It is remarkable not only for its precedence of the national by fifteen days, but for the purity of its patriotism and its utterance of the sacred truths of liberty.

Bold indeed were they, when royal authority was supreme and when the church received its maintenance almost entirely from the crown, to make such declarations. It was treason, and treason was death. The preamble, "professing our allegiance to the king," reads like bitter mockery. The very souls of the signers seemed to exult themselves in the roundness of the sentences and the flourishes of their pens. It would be interesting to know who was the author of those patriotic words,—who the Jefferson of that occasion. I am inclined, from what is known traditionally, to accredit its authorship to Richard Hoskins, whose name appears first. The spirit of liberty seemed to have taken entire hold upon his family.

His wife, as I have written elsewhere, was a member of the "Historic Tea-party of Edenton, 1774," and signed the noted protest against tea-drinking.

Richard Hoskins was a zealous and fearless patriot: joining the American army at the first sound to arms, he served with signal bravery and courage until its close. During his absence his wife managed his entire farming interest with prudence and profit, and proved always to him an efficient helpmate. When they were first married they came down the Roanoke



"HAYES": HOME OF GOVERNOR SAMUEL JOHNSTON—BUILT IN 1801.

NOW THE RESIDENCE OF MR. JOHN G. WOOD.

river in an open boat, crossed the Albemarle sound, and landed at Edenton. He then took his bride behind his own horse to his farm by a bridle path, there being no public roads in that direction then. Her wedding dress she spun and wove from flax grown upon her father's farm. So delicate and smooth was the warp, that when she was preparing it for the loom she passed the entire chain through her ring. The art of home production probably reached its greatest perfection about this time. All connection with the mother country was severed, and the colonists thrown upon

their own resources. It was indispensable to every lady's education that she should know how to spin, sew, and weave. The spider-like fineness of their yarns, the exquisite beauty of their needlework, and the lacy filminess of the woven fabrics which their nimble fingers wrought, are the envy and admiration of the present age.

Edward Everett, the great statesman, said upon one occasion that "national recollection was the foundation of national character." It seems proper that the celebration of national anniversaries should be perpetuated, and that the great men and great events of our country should ever be kept before the youth of our land, not only to develop patriotism and stimulate example, but to bring about a love for the study of our own history. It is written of the warlike and unlettered Spartans, that before going into battle they offered sacrifices and poured out libations to the Muses, that their valiant and virtuous deeds should not be unsung and unrecorded. We are too careless of our state history: already skeptical writers are beginning to doubt the authenticity of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence.

Our colonial records are a vast mine of historic wealth, but without an index are a chaos of undigested material which nobody can use, and on that account are thoroughly disappointing to all investigators and students of our state history. New York and Pennsylvania have both made valuable indexes for their colonial records, and it seems plainly the duty of the press of North Carolina to urge immediate legislative action upon the subject. This is the age of the revival of history, and unless some steps are taken to stimulate interest in the study of our state history oblivion must be our fate.

Richard Dillard

EDENTON, NORTH CAROLINA.

UNIVERSITY OF N.C. AT CHAPEL HILL



00034014511

FOR USE ONLY IN
THE NORTH CAROLINA COLLECTION

